



An Experiment with Desire

by Shirley Heater

“You are this very moment who you desire to be!”

This statement made in a preaching service jolted me because of my ongoing experiment with desire. It focused on an aspect I had not considered. I thought that Sunday morning about Alma’s words that God grants to men according to their desires (Alma 15:55) and also the words of Jacob that God delivered to the Jews things they could not understand because they desired it (Jacob 3:22-25). Was I like the Jews, not desiring God’s best? I could only answer, ‘yes.’

Over the preceding months, my hunger for a deeper relationship with the Lord had grown and he had shown me that desire was the key.

God has desires, too!

My testimony actually begins about three years ago when I was studying Alma 16. One particular verse came alive for me: “God . . . desireth in the first place that ye

should believe, yea, even on his word” (Alma 16:144). I saw for the first time that God has desires and that our believing his word was “top priority.” This became my “top priority” as I read and studied the scriptures.

Then last summer after my initial fervor had faded to routine, my scripture study took on sharp new significance. As I prayed over several concerns, the Lord’s answer came to me clearly: “Put me first!” My response was, “Show me how.” I was taken back to Alma 16:144 as a beginning point.

An experiment

I noted that Alma 16:144 serves as an introduction to Alma’s parable of the seed. For the first time I saw it as instruction from the Lord on how to move from where I was to where I wanted to be. Verse 151 contained the key:

But behold, if ye will awake
and arouse your faculties
Even to an experiment upon
my words,
And exercise a particle of faith;

Yea, even if ye can no more
than desire to believe,
Let this desire work in
you,
Even until ye believe in a
manner
That ye can give place for a
portion of my words.

Alma 16:151

Because it says “even if ye can no more than desire to believe,” I said to the Lord, “Lord, I desire to believe. I thought I was believing, but if there’s something that I’m missing, something I don’t understand, tell me what it is.”

I also noted that this verse says, “Let this desire work in you.” As I pondered on what this meant, I thought of baking bread. When I put yeast in warm water with a little honey to activate the yeast, it expands and grows—it’s no longer just a cup of liquid, but will more than double in size. The yeast actually “works” while it is in the water. Then I thought about desire working in me in this way. I responded, “Lord, I want my desire to grow like the yeast.” I made the decision, the choice, that I wanted this desire.

The Lord himself became the object of my desire

As I prayed for desire over a period of several days, I began to recognize that certain things in my daily routine were lessening in importance. On coming home from work, my usual habit had been to sit and relax, maybe turn on the TV. Now when I did this, I began to feel restless. This was not how the Lord wanted me to feed my soul. So I began to rearrange my schedule and look forward to spending time with the Lord and his word.

What happened next I will compare to the seed in Alma 16:152-153. As I spent more time with the Lord and his word, I became aware that something special was happening. I began to feel a love for the Lord growing within me. I hadn't expected that. However, since one of the meanings of desire is love, I understood for the first time that when we begin to desire and that desire works in us, the result is love—love for the Lord that grows.

My excitement was heightened when I remembered Nephi's vision. Nephi is told by an angel that the love of God, which is the Lamb of God, or the tree of life, is the most desirable above all things (1 Nephi 3:62-64). The Bible concordance led me to two other meaningful scriptures. Proverbs 13:12 also links desire with a tree of life: "...when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (I especially like the New American Standard translation which reads: "...desire fulfilled is a tree of life"). I also found a passage in Haggai 2:7 where the Messiah is called "the Desire of All Nations." When Desire comes, he fulfills us and he brings us life; he is that tree of life. There is the tree of life in Lehi's vision, the tree of life in Nephi's vision and the tree of life in Alma's parable. They are all pointing out the same thing—that it is the Lord himself who is to be the object of our desire, and he is to be our tree of life.

Desire means to hunger and thirst

As I thought about the tree of life, I wondered about the fruit of the tree and if there was some significance relating to desire. Since one of the meanings of desire is "to hunger and thirst," I found it interesting that in Alma's parable feasting upon the fruit of the tree results in no longer being hungry or thirsty (Alma 16:172). This also seemed to relate to Jesus's words recorded in John 6:35: "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

"the Lamb of God, or the tree of life, is the most desirable above all things..."

I also became curious about the word partake (used with fruit, salvation, goodness, heavenly gift, etc.). I had always applied the common usage "to eat or take." However, I discovered that various Bible dictionaries define partake as "to fellowship with, commune, share together." I marvelled at how this deeper meaning more accurately portrayed my experience of desire.

After considering these and other scriptures, it occurred to me that it was no coincidence that the Lord uses food to illustrate our response to him. The fruit is delicious, sweet, white and pure—a perfect metaphor for the Lord himself. I was astonished when I saw a correlation with one of the most serious problems in this country, obsession with sugar (evidenced by increasing instances of diabetes, hypoglycemia and tooth decay). Sugar is white, it is sweet, it is refined, and it is desirable. I saw obsession with sugar specifically and food in general as a perversion in the

natural realm of the truth that is in the spiritual realm.

Desire comes from God and he also fulfills it

As I read these scriptures and pondered on what I was experiencing, I remembered a familiar verse from Psalm 37:4:

Delight thyself also in the Lord,
And he will give thee the desires of thine heart.

I understood for the first time the double meaning in the word "give." The Lord caused the correct desire to grow within me. In other words, I couldn't conjure it up. He actually planted in my heart the desire for him. The second part of the meaning is that the Lord also granted the fulfillment of that desire. He had actually performed a twofold action in me. He put within me the desire for him, and then he fulfilled it with a deeper love for him. My responsibility was to make the choice to have desire.

Desire is a choice

The words I heard that Sunday now have an even more profound significance for me. I realize that I have made choices in the past that have put other things before the Lord. I could see that before this experience, I hadn't trusted him completely. I had been giving him a back seat. And it was because of this I was getting exactly what I had desired; in fact, I was trying to fulfill my own desires. He was saying to me: "Put me first. Make room for me in your heart. I will bring you life." When I desired him over everything else, he began to show me that many things I had been choosing over him are unimportant. And he brought a fulfillment that I couldn't even comprehend—a deeper revelation of himself!



the learning of the Jews

The Purpose Principle in Action: Why "Heads"?

I had heard Ray preach and teach the purpose principle many times:

"What is in the Book of Mormon is there for a purpose."

"Peter, James and John were taken to the mount of transfiguration because they asked many questions."

"When you find something you don't understand in the Book of Mormon, ask the Lord, 'Why is that in the Book of Mormon?'"

One Sunday evening while teaching a Book of Mormon class, I used the reference in Jacob 1:4 to help explain the contents of the small plates of Nephi:

And if there were preaching
which was sacred,
Or revelation which was great,
or prophesying,
That I should engrave the *heads*
of them upon these plates
And touch upon them as much as it
were possible

For Christ's sake and for the
sake of our people.
(italics added)

As an aside, I commented to the class that many years previously I had circled the word "heads" and penciled a large question mark in the margin of my Book of Mormon. I asked the class if anyone had any insight as to the meaning of the word "heads." A few people offered suggestions, but none had any real answers. The context of the verse seemed to give the larger meaning without revealing exactly what "heads" meant. I commented before continuing the lesson that here was an opportunity to make use of the purpose principle. Why was the word "heads" in the Book of Mormon?

The next day I had a phone call from Angela Crowell. She asked, "Would you like to know the meaning of the word 'heads'?" She had my attention! Then she proceeded to share with me that my comment the previous night had caused her to wonder if "heads" was a Hebraism. So in checking her Hebrew dictionaries and the *Theological Wordbook* by Harris, Archer, Waltke (1980:825), she found these definitions for the root word:

rosh - head; top, summit, upper part, chief, total sum

The authors of the *Theological Wordbook* give this fuller explanation for the root from which "heads" is derived:

The root is widely used in the Old Testament with other terms in the sense of the superlative, since Hebrew does not have any simple form to express the third degree. There are many examples of this usage (Exodus 30:23) where the meaning is "best," "foremost," the uniquely finest, which alone was fit for the service of God.

In other words, Jacob could have said:

"And if there were preaching
which was sacred,
Or revelation which was great,
or prophesying,
That I should engrave the [best]
of them . . ."

Or he could have said:

"That I should engrave the
[foremost] of them . . ."

Or he even could have said:

"That I should engrave the
[uniquely finest] of them . . ."

Understanding the Hebraism "heads" gives a much clearer understanding of Jacob's words. Jacob was reiterating the commandment given to Nephi about the contents of the small plates, i.e., he should only engrave on the small plates the very best, or foremost or the uniquely finest of the preaching, revelation or prophecies during his lifetime.

Nephi's own account of receiving this commandment found in 1 Nephi 5:223 confirms the meaning of the Hebraism "heads:"

And after I had made these
[small] plates by
way of commandment,
I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies,
The more plain and precious parts of them
Should be written upon these
plates. (italics added)

Nephi's words, "the more plain and precious parts," equates to Jacob's use of "heads," i.e., the best, foremost, uniquely finest.

No doubt you will want to mark your Book of Mormon as I have marked mine. Instead of a question mark in the margin I now have the words: "Hebraism: best, foremost, uniquely finest."

Why then is the word "heads" in the Book of Mormon? This distinct Hebraism is another confirmation that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be—an ancient, sacred record written by Hebrew speakers.

The purpose principle works! ZRF

What's in a Number?

After reading E.W. Bullinger's book, *Number in Scripture*, I realized that the Hebrew people attached special significance to individual numbers. Turning to Mosiah chapter 11 of the Book of Mormon, I found an interesting correlation between the events of the account and the number of days traveled by Alma's people. Knowing the significance of the numbers serves as an emphasis for points which might otherwise go unnoticed in this portion of the story.

EIGHT

"New Beginnings"

EIGHT days from the land of Mormon to Helam (Mosiah 11:1-4)

Alma's people fled from the armies of King Noah into the wilderness. They traveled eight days and established a city free from the bondage and iniquitous influence of their former land. Their "new beginning" was marked by the journey of eight days; the number eight is associated with "new beginnings" (Bullinger 1894:200).

ONE "Unity"

ONE day from Helam to the valley of Alma (Mosiah 11:69)

Alma's people were led out of bondage by the power of God. They traveled one day and camped in the valley of Alma. Mosiah 11:72 states that the people were united in praise and thanksgiving to God for his deliverance. The number one is associated with "unity" (Bullinger 1894:50) and helps to emphasize their oneness of heart and mind as they praised God. They were all united in the knowledge that they had been delivered by divine means.

TWELVE

"Perfection in Government"

TWELVE days from the valley of Alma to Zarahemla (Mosiah 11:75-76)

Alma's people continued their journey and arrived in Zarahemla twelve days later. After a twelve-day journey, Alma's people found themselves in the righteous kingdom of Mosiah, a kingdom in which the

people were known as the "children of Christ." Interestingly, the number twelve is associated with "perfection in government" (Bullinger 1894:253).

TWENTY-ONE

"Divine Completion"

TWENTY-ONE days total travel from the land of Mormon to Zarahemla (Mosiah 11:3, 69, 76)

The total number of days traveled from the land of Mormon to Zarahemla was twenty-one days. It is interesting to note that twenty-one is the number of "divine completion" (Bullinger 1894:262). This helps to emphasize the fact that it was by divine means that Alma's people were delivered from bondage in order to travel to Zarahemla, the designated land of their inheritance. The fact that only God could deliver his people is stressed time after time in the book of Mosiah. The arrival of Alma's people in Zarahemla not only marked the completion of their journey, but it also marked the completion of the ingathering of God's people to Zarahemla.

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